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ABSTRACT

This paper from the 1976 Southeastern Conference on Human Development is an overview of the attitudes that have influenced the research and writings on childrearing form 1920 to 1950. The content of articles in popular periodicals on infants and child care for mothers is reviewed in relation to the themes and scientific movements of the period. Concern about good moral training, a dominant theme around 1900, had disappeared by the 1920s, and was replaced by an emphasis on proper health conditions and strict discipline. The writings of Emmett Holt and John B. Watson advocating strict regimes of behavioral control dominated childrearing philosophy at a time when society looked to science as a social as well as technological instrument. By the 1940s a third major stage in maternal models emerged into prominence. This model was characterized by a preoccupation with personality development, with a particular emphasis on the importance of emotional security provided by parental "tender loving care." This return to more natural influences reflected a basic conception of child development which considered the child to possess positive growth forces. The New Deal and the upheaval of family life during World War II fostered a compassionate, responsible societal attitude towards its children. The nature-nurture controversy was of interest to child development specialists throughout the period discussed. (Author/SB)

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CHANGING CONCEPTS OF CHILDREARING, 1920s - 1950s

Parental research, parental guidance, social issues

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In this bicentennial year of our republic we of the discipline of child development might well be celebrating our semi-centennial existence. To be sure, we lack the dramatically formative occasion of a declaration of independence; yet our emergence as a publicly visible enterprise of child research may be quite precisely pinpointed in the late 1920s, when the strong vision and energetic entrepreneurship of Lawrence Frank provided the guiding force in marshalling the financial resources of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Fund to create the Institutes of Child Welfare that were the child research field for two decades. As our common cause is only now into middle-age years, we have just begun to have serious reflections upon the developmental course of our professional past. Two initial, valuable contributions were offered last year by colleagues who have run the course--Robert Sears' chapter in Volume 5 of the Review of Research in Child Development (6) and Milton Senn's presentation of his extensive oral history interview series with prominent members of the field in a recent monograph of SRCD (7). For the past few years I have been engaged in a personal voyage on the seas of American ideology of childrearing, from our Puritan forebearers to the contemporary scene,

from Plymouth rock to folk rock. Today I wish to share with you some thoughts derived from my attempt to untangle the complex interweaving of societal needs and concerns about the children of the republic, as reflected in the childrearing advice of the popular media, the conceptual thrust of research into parental behaviors, and public concerns about children, during three decades of striking changes in such considerations, the period from the 1920s to the 50s.

As Sears has pointed out in his historical survey, the discipline of child development grew out of relevance to societal concerns, its content and multi-disciplinary structure a product of demands for social usefulness, formed by external pressures and broadly based on desires to better the health, the rearing, the education of children. The particular point of my own presentation here is that with respect to explorations into the realm of parenting, researchers are in part guided by available relevant theoretical propositions, but also in part by the contemporary concerns about guidelines for childrearing as shared by researchers and parents, the fashions of the times as expressed in the popular literature for parental consumption. The salience of particular conceptual orientations among investigators in any period are not necessarily due to their inherent or demonstrated theoretical power, but may well be a function of contemporary societal needs and ideologies.

Since it is difficult to follow the play of a complicated and unfamiliar game without a program, I have provided you with a table setting forth some of the major themes, persons, and actions bearing upon

conceptions about children and their appropriate rearing for the first half of the present century. The time line shown on the left margin is to be taken as representing a continuous flux, the decade designations only approximate indicators of the items included.

First of all, let us consider the content of articles on infant and child care provided for mothers in periodicals of the times. As you can readily see from scanning the left-hand column of the handout, the dominant theme of concern about good moral training had disappeared by the 20s, replaced by emphasis upon proper health conditions and strict discipline, this preoccupation in turn yielding by the 40s to a prevalent theme of optimizing personality development with emotional security by lots of TLC. These dramatic swings in central concerns for parenting are most clearly evident in Stendler's analysis of three leading women's magazines, 1890 to the 1940s, as shown in the reproduction of the table from her publication of 1950 (8). The parallel analyses of Vincent (9) and Wolfenstein (10) clearly confirm these trends. How are we to explain such gusty winds confronting successive, actually overlapping, generations of mothers as they sought to steer a navigable course of proper childrearing? What occasioned the rapid changes in models of child care emanating from constant sources of parental advice?

Perhaps advances in the biological and social sciences had by the second decade provided systematic knowledge about child growth and development that indicated restrictive regimes of infant and child care as most promotive of sound development? The only data on children of public

concern at the time was the high rate of infant mortality. Otherwise, we simply had no systematic data on infants and children that might serve as a knowledge base for maternal counsel. As we shall see, research into behavioral development of early childhood did not begin until Gesell began his clinic at Yale in 1911, and the results of his careful monitoring of emergent behaviors did not become publicly available until the late 20s (3). If we enlarge our vision to the more general cultural scene of the early years of the century, there would seem to be two strong and significant themes of major influence upon childrearing advice, one the residual of a long American heritage and the other a newer product of the 19th Century.

The dominant theme of guiding character development of children by providing a good home influence that Stendler finds in the first decade was not merely a product of Victorian idealism, but permeates the whole history of American childrearing ideology from the first days of the Europeans upon these shores, most vividly and articulately with our Puritan forefathers (and mothers) in the New England colonies. Time does not permit me to dwell today upon the fascinating variations of the theme of moral training primacy over the first three centuries of American western civilization. Suffice to note that the first generation of parents in this century were still being told by childrearing experts that sound character was the first order of business in raising their young. Meanwhile, the whole progressive reform movement of the late 19th Century had begun to focus on the well-being of the child as essential to a sound,

healthy nation, due to a number of accelerating societal concerns involving the young members of our society. Among these may be noted the negative human by-products of intensified industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, resulting in organized societal efforts to regulate the conditions of child labor, education, health, and delinquency. In essence, the century of the child meant an accumulated public awareness and assumption of responsibility with demands for social action about the apparent failures of family and society to foster the welfare of children. Public knowledge of such conditions and needs set the stage for societal demands upon science to turn its attention and resources to acquisition of data about children. We should note in this regard that the parental advice focus upon character development of the Victorian era was premised upon the privacy of the family circle as the principal arena of promoting child interests, by contrast with the early Puritan community regulation of parent and child behaviors. By the end of our first World War, the home had been invaded by societal concerns about hygienic conditions of infant and child care. Shades of our forebearers of old, yet with quite a different emphasis as to the proper goals and means of forming the national child.

The second and new major cultural theme of the early century decades that came to have prevailing influence upon child care orientations of the 1920s and 30s was the accumulative impact of 19th Century scientific technology as a central contribution to national economic affluence, enhancing not only the general standard of living but the long-

standing American faith in practical inventiveness. The emergence and establishment of the sciences as a national enterprise and resource in the latter decades of the last century, especially as manifested in engineering and medical research, gave promise of a brave new world of the better life based solidly upon certain knowledge rather than idealism or moral precepts. The strong belief in science as a social instrument became the tocsin of the intellectual liberals of the progressive reform movement. Technology, though contributory to social problems by promoting industrialization and urbanization, also became seen as a powerful force for solving all problems, including human ones. The new scientific age confronted and quickly subdued the Victorian idealism of righteous morality as rank sentimentality. Within this revolutionary context of change in cultural values, a recasting of the maternal role from moral guardian and exemplar to childrearing technician was perhaps inevitable. And just such a maternal model most clearly characterizes the child care advice of the 'tween-wars decades. With two major scientific experts in the prior period we begin to see the interlock between the work of child professionals and the public ideology of childrearing.

The first of these was Emmett Holt, the New York practicing, teaching, and preaching pediatrician. As already indicated, the high rate of infant mortality became a matter of great public concern in the late 1800s. Medical research had established poor hygienic conditions as a major factor, with resultant emphasis in pediatric practice upon strict, closely monitored and controlled regimes of infant care in all

aspects of basic functions. Dr. Holt's book, The Care and Feeding of Children, first published in 1894, quickly became the most popular advocate of the new doctrine of mothers as technicians, closely pursuing detailed regimes laid down by the medical experts. The initial converts were no doubt the better educated, middle-class young mothers who sought pediatric care and counsel, but by the late 1920s and 30s, the highly controlling, rigorous regimes of infant care were being promulgated in the new well-baby clinics across the country.

The other major professional figure of the early century significant to childrearing ideology was that prophet of behaviorism in American psychology, John B. Watson. Watson's crusade for a psychology based upon manifest, observable behavior shook the foundations of the solemn temple of introspective structuralism and opened the doors to the scientific study of a whole range of organisms, including the human infant. And he eagerly pursued that particular creature with help of Mary Jones, Rosalind Raynor, and others, demonstrating in the classic studies of fear conditioning with Albert and Peter, that even emotional responses that he believed to be based upon organismic givens were capable of formative learning effects. More than this, for our purposes, he took most seriously his role as a major prophet of the new child care doctrine, explicitly acknowledging his emulation of Holt in seeking to set forth strict regimes of behavioral control. Watson was very much a man of his times--a social reformer, a strong believer in science as a social instrument, and abhorrent of Victorian sentimentality. Thus, with both Holt and Watson we can

see that they not only were significant contributors to the childrearing ideology of their times, but indeed were the products of their era, the articulate, public professional representatives of changing cultural values.

Although Watson's program of infant studies never got beyond the initial efforts, due to his retirement from academia in the early 20s, his childrearing crusade continued through the decade with his book, The Psychological Care of Infant and Child, appearing in 1928. And the close monitoring, strictly controlling child regimes fostered by him prevailed in the maternal advice of the widely distributed Children's Bureau pamphlets, women's magazines, and other periodicals. Curiously, despite Watson's strong impact on both the field of psychology and public child care advice, his environmentalist orientation seems to have had little influence upon the discipline of child development as the field emerged and functioned in the 20s and 30s. The Child Welfare Institutes had the dual task of creating from scratch a knowledge basis of child development and of simultaneous promoting education of child caretakers about such knowledge. They set about collecting normative data on a broad range of children from infancy to adolescence, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, with particular attention to motor and intellectual functions. To understand the particular choice of behaviors studied and the prevailing underlying conceptual orientation, we again need to consider the broader cultural context.

Interest in the development of motor functions would seem to have reflected both the Darwinian conception of behavioral evolution and the

public interest in physical development as reflected in childrearing literature. Stendler found that articles on physical development were the most frequent content area throughout her survey. The interest in mental functions may also be seen to follow from evolutionary perspective, as well as from the pragmatic concerns of public education with Binet and Terman's tool to work in the service of academic prediction and planning.

For both motor and mental development, the prevailing conceptual model of the times was the genetic orientation of maturation as the primary determinant. This conceptual model of child behaviors, articulately represented by Arnold Gesell, was quite in contrast with Watson's environmentalism. One of the major controversies in psychology of the late 30s and early 40s was the nature-nurture battle about intelligence. I would propose that the nature-nurture conflict was fundamentally a reflection of long term competition between American ideals of elitism and equalitarianism. The rampant entreprenurial elitism of the 19th Century industrial society seemed to find scientific self-justification in the wide-spread belief of more privileged groups in social Darwinism, the notion that the survival of the fittest applies to arena of human affairs. At the same time the political idealism of egalitarianism became a social-economic doctrine of liberal reformers, embodying the premise of environmental determination of individual attainments. As intellectual assessment became more clearly linked to educational and occupational advantage, it inevitably became a battleground between the haves and the have-nots. And we have been experiencing an intense revival of this conflict on a broader societal canvas

in the past decade. Once again, I would propose that the choices of child research activity and conceptions were both a reflection of societal issues and, in turn, contributed to their saliency.

We come now to the third phase of major shifts in maternal models as expressed in the popular childrearing literature, the emergence into prominence of a preoccupation with personality development, with etiological explanations of behaviors and a particular emphasis upon the importance of emotional security, to be fostered by a loving, permissive approach to the child. Stendler finds this new model strongly evident by 1940 in the women's magazines and the point of view became the guiding light of the post-war baby boom with the publication of Ben Spock's Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care in 1945-46. Although qualified by Spock himself and others during the 50s in terms of the child's need for some basic limits on freedom of behavior, the model swept the market of popular maternal advice and retained domination until the late 60s.

Again, how are we to explain the abrupt turn-about in conceptions from high parental control and emotional reserve as the proper maternal model to one of low control and high positive affect? Had research into parent behaviors and related child development provided information that would indicate such child handling as maximizing child welfare? Hardly so, as parental research had only begun in the 30s at Berkeley, Minnesota, and Fels, and the data would not become available until the late 40s and thereafter. There were, however, influential conceptual contributions accumulating from other professional sources during the 30s. Work with

troubled children and families by the child guidance clinics had developed parallel to the child research institutes, with significant initial support from the Commonwealth Foundation. This movement for rehabilitation of psychological development and prevention of behavioral disorders took on a prevailing conceptual orientation of psychoanalytic theory. Also, by the mid-30s psychoanalytic propositions had begun to make inroads into the thinking of academic psychologists, most notably at Yale's Human Relations Institute, where Dollard, Miller, Sears, Whiting, and others were seeking to apply learning theory propositions to the insights of dynamic personality theory. Sears was to carry such interest with him to the Iowa Child Institute as a new, young director in 1942, where he began a series of studies on maternal behaviors as antecedents of child personality. The conceptual model involved, a marriage of the learning theory parent to the psychoanalytic child, characterized most of the parent studies that mushroomed over the next two decades.

This dominant theoretical model of research into parental determinants of personality development focused upon those areas of child behavior most salient in psychoanalytic theory--dependency, aggression, sex-typing, and conscience--in terms of parental variables derived in part from learning theory: reward and punishment, and in part from psychoanalytic concerns with parental restrictiveness and affection. The goals of childrearing involved therein would be a child more independent than dependent, less rather than more aggressive, with a sex-role in accord with biology, and of more self-control than external regulation. From Becker's survey

of the consequences of parental discipline as culled from accumulated studies in the early 60s, such preferential patterns of child behaviors were found more often with parenting of variable control, rather less than more, positive feelings toward the child rather than negative or indifference affect, and calm rather than intense involvement with the child (1). Yet the public availability of this model with accompanying data did not come about until the 50s, though the stirrings of the formulation occurred simultaneously with its public appearance in the childrearing literature. Once more we must turn to the larger cultural scene in search of precipitating factors.

Let us consider the case of the apostle Ben, that eloquently compassionate spokesman to mothers of the post-war years. Although he has recently been castigated by the reactionary right of childrearing philosophy for promoting a whole generation of unpalatable rebels, his model of child caretaking did not place major emphasis upon indulgent permissiveness. Rather, he sought to free mothers from dogmatic doctrinaire bondage to the rigorous but rigid 'tween-wars experts, as he had found in his pediatric practice of the 30s that mothers became intensely anxious about inability to adhere to their rightly restricted, highly controlling regimes. So his principal message to mothers was the reassurance that their own feelings and common sense would be best for both themselves and the child. Such a posture of inherent or naturally acquired maternal wisdom followed easily and logically from his own basic conceptions about child development: that the child is possessed of positive growth forces, that he is an innately

rational, affectionate, self-regulating, resiliant being.

Spock, along with Senn, was one of the pioneers in teaching about child behavior in pediatric training. This interest had led him to familiarity with and incorporation of both Gesell's normative data and psychoanalytic concepts of personality development. Thus his book signalled the switch in childrearing emphasis from high control and emotional reserve to low control and emotional involvement.

We are left with the important question of the changing cultural climate of the 30s and 40s that both gave impetus to the development of the new maternal model and provided ready receptivity to promotion thereof by both the popular experts and the child researchers. An accumulative sequence of national affairs seems to have paved the way for the radical reversals of course in 20th Century childrearing ideology. In part, the scientism ideology of the 20s, coupled with the hedonistic flavor of the flapper era may be seen as a repudiation of the moral crusade of the progressive reform movement, a disillusionment of Wilsonian idealism to make the world safe for democracy. Yet, in turn, the new shiny banner of the scientific society as leading straight to the promised land was to suffer cruel and abrupt disillusion with the onset of the depression years in 1929. Out of the crucible of that time was forged, under the hammer of Roosevelt's administration, a new commitment of national responsibility for the welfare of all citizens.

Basic to the New Deal programs was federal manipulation of economic revitalization to bolster family security through gainful employment of the

breadwinners. Furthermore, attention and support was given more directly to family and child welfare by innovative social, educational, and health legislation and programs. The concerns about children were necessarily centered upon provisions for primary care needs of food, shelter, clothing. The responsibility for child care became much more than a family affair, with government sponsored day care programs, health clinics, social security supports, and school lunch programs. More and more professionals became involved in more children's lives, especially social workers. The euphoric sense of absolute confidence in the 20s had been destroyed, the nation turning instead to an anguishing process of self-examination and a willingness to cut and try solutions to immediate pragmatic problems of individual, familial, and national survival.

All of this restorative effort seems to have engendered a renewed compassion for the young, a protective attitude in troubled times, a wish to provide them freely with whatever might be available in the midst of scarcity. So there emerged a strengthening of intimate emotional ties and a more lenient attitude toward child control, providing thereby the seedbed for fertilization of a new model of parenting based upon concern with personal, emotional functioning as expressed in psychoanalytic theory.

The effects of the World War II years upon child and family life served to further accenturate this focus, in that so many fathers were both separated from families and lost, while many mothers emerged from homes to take up war work. Further sensitivity to disruptive family life with

serious negative effects upon children was further increased by the war orphans of Europe and the new studies of the detrimental effects of institutionalization (2). So children had in the course of a mere decade or so become transformed from objects of manipulation in parental and societal interests to preciously unique individuals to be treasured in their own right.

An important issue underlying this transition is the value orientation about the basic moral nature of mankind (4). Within a half century the childrearing literature reflected three quite different positions on the inherent moral status of children. Shades of Calvinistic concerns about innately evil but containable forces were still evident in the focus upon moral training of the early century years. The scientific child of the 20s was premised rather upon the Enlightenment conception of innate moral neutrality with capacities for both good and evil. The Spockian child of the 40s was based on yet another premise, that of innate goodness. In the past decade of youth rebellion and an unpopular war that assumption has become seriously questioned.

The long-standing concern of American parents with the moral character of their children is hardly surprising, as many historians of our culture have highlighted our national preoccupation with a moral posture, a concern with the right and wrong of behavior, and a justification of our behaviors in moral terms. The Calvinistic struggle with the old deluder has been a strong, continuing part of our heritage. Given the saliency of moral issues, we might well expect control of the child's

behavior and affection toward him to be of central relevance in childrearing. And indeed such has been the case. Schaefer (5) and Becker (1) have each carefully surveyed the accumulative data on parent behaviors to derive by factor analysis the principal dimensions, the gross anatomy, of parental actions. These turn out in both instances to be essentially two bi-polar factors--restrictive versus permissive, and warmth versus hostility--with Becker adding a third of calm detachment versus anxious involvement. The latter may well be a product of the aspirin age, but control and affection are clearly long term elements of the American family scene, not newly emergent products of psychological theories, though they no doubt influence conceptual saliency and may be expressed in theoretical terms. Indeed, the changes in childrearing models considered herein may well be charted on Becker's three-dimensional grid, but that is the subject for yet another paper.

By way of conclusion, I would note that we have been hearing a good deal in recent years about the question of the relevancy of child research to social needs. I would propose from the foregoing survey of childrearing ideology that we have always been relevant in the sense of attention to child and parent functions of interest and concern to our society. The question is rather one of accountability; how well have we served both in providing a body of knowledge pertinent to societal issues and how well have we done in making that knowledge available to the body politic?

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Table II. Percentage of methods recommended for two aspects of child training as they appeared in three women's magazines analyzed in 10-year intervals for 1890-1948

	% 1890	% 1900	% 1910	% 1920	% 1930	% 1940	% 1948
I. Guiding Character or Personality Development							
Discipline (reward and/ or punishment	18	14	34	34	38	28	2
Provide a good home influence	61	53	30	12	14	5	3
Ignore undesirable behavior	12	5	9	0	12	18	4
Look for cause and plan accordingly	0	0	0	1	14	48	84
Invoke divine aid	15	20	15	0	0	0	0
Feed properly	0	0	0	50	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	4	5	12	3	21	2	8
II. Infant Disciplines							
Tightly schedule, cry it out	0	22	77	100	75	33	0
Loosely schedule	100	78	23	0	0	0	0
Self-regulate, "mother"	0	0	0	0	25	66	100

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PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF CHILDREARING
United States, 1900-1950

	Childrearing Literature	Child Study	Societal Themes & Events
1900-	Moral training Mother as loving model Permissive infant care	Holt & infant mortality Hall & genetic tradition	Progressivism Medical, educational & social reforms Philanthropic foundations First White House Conference on Children
1910-	More discipline & control Concern @ bad habits - crying, auto-erotic impulses	Watson & behaviorism	Children's Bureau "End of Innocence"
1920-	Strict infant & child care Concern @ nutrition Social legislation	Watson's infant studies Gesell's infant studies	Science as social instrument Founding of child study institutes, child guidance, & well-baby clinics
1930-	Focus on physical development & feeding Concern @ dominating child, strict handling Mother as childrearing technician	Normative studies of motor & mental development Learning theories Nature-Nurture controversy Family studies: Berkeley, Fels, Minnesota	Federal supports for family maintenance & day care programs Parent education groups: home management & family dynamics
1940-	Permissive infant care Focus on emotional security, tender loving care Personality development, genetic orientation Child as constructivist Gesell & Spock	Studies of parent behaviors Learning theory & psychoanalysis (Sears) Studies of maternal deprivation	Wartime family separations Post-war baby boom